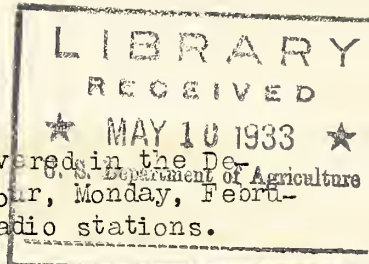


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FORESTRY TO THE FORE



A radio talk by R. Y. Stuart, Chief, Forest Service delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Monday, February 27, 1933, and broadcast by a network of 49 associate NBC radio stations.

The country has many grievous ills and there is no lack of suggestions to cure them. Some of the ills are temporary; others are of long standing but now in a very acute stage. Perhaps the outstanding sufferer from an acute ill is agriculture, a basic resource industry.

Agriculture and forestry have much in common. Their ability to serve public needs and promote prosperity depends upon proper use of land and conditions favorable to crop production. Everyone believes that the maladjustments in agriculture must be corrected. Forestry, as a companion to agriculture in productive land use, is now recognized as a means not only of meeting our wood needs, but of helping solve our grievous rural land problems.

I am going to try to point out, in somewhat general terms, some of the fundamental forest problems facing our country. Thirty years ago the public knew little of forestry in this country because there was little of it. But as forestry has grown the public understanding of forest problems has increased. An attitude of indifference has been changed to one of concern. From completely unorganized forest effort we have progressed to nation-wide provision for public forestry policies. Thirty years ago we had practically no forest protection. Today more than half of the Nation's forest land has some measure of protection from fire. People have come to recognize the public responsibility and to see the benefits in forestry. We see that forestry involves much more than the simple culture of trees. We have gained considerable scientific knowledge needed for better management and economic use of forest lands and forest products. Not so long ago only a handful of pioneers were urging that our forest resources be not wasted away; now a considerable body of well trained men, experienced, resourceful, and competent, are grappling with the growing problem.

Bear in mind that forestry's field of action is not only the production of timber but the effects of forests upon man's livelihood, his standards of living, and happiness. Forestry is more than trees. It encompasses the influences of soil, water, climate, and living things. It develops and maintains productive forests and protected watersheds, well managed forest range for domestic stock and game, safeguarded scenic and recreational values, and planned utilization of varied resources. Forestry is sustained order and good trusteeship in the forest.

The outstanding instance of the application of sound forestry practices on a large scale in this country is the National Forests. These areas, set aside to meet the public necessities for timber supplies and to maintain favorable conditions of waterflow, have clearly demonstrated their public worth and security. They represent public ownership and administration of natural resources at its best. As is the case with the National Forests, efficient administration of natural resources can be and is being given by other public agencies.

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Whether it wishes or not, the public must concern itself even more deeply with the condition and care of our forest resources, so essential to our welfare. True, our American spirit, traditions and institutions have led to private ownership of land and private development of the great natural resources. Many are inclined to distrust the capacity of government to do things efficiently, discriminatingly, and farsightedly. They believe that individual self-interest and the play of economic forces will in the long run assure the best use of our land resources. But the fact is that individual interest, by and large, has not served to maintain forest lands in a productive condition for timber supply, for watershed protection, and for the other benefits derived from well managed forests. This fact has created a public problem of vital importance -- how to bring about the right use of the vast area of privately owned land in the United States which can only be used for forest purposes. It is a public problem because the benefits of right use of forest lands extend far beyond their boundaries. The waste and loss that results if they are wrongly handled affect every citizen of the country.

Most private owners have acquired forest land because of the value or expected value of the grown timber on it. But unless the private owners find that after cutting over the land, they can afford to grow more timber on it, the land will come back into public ownership through tax delinquency. Such land is already coming back into public ownership at an appalling rate. This is not a temporary situation. It has been under way for several decades. We must plan for the best use of this land and of the large amount of land now in cultivation not fitted for growing agricultural crops. The owners and the nation must determine the future use of the 397 million acres of commercial forest land now in private ownership and the 52 million acres of land which agriculture does not or will not need.

The first job is to give productive value to land which the private owner is preparing to abandon, or likely to abandon, because he can see no probability that holding it will be worth while; of land that has become a private liability and that, if abandoned to the public, may be a public liability; land which, further, is a liability to the community, whether privately owned or abandoned to public ownership.

The only possible owner of land for which there is no profitable form of private use is the public. No one will permanently hold and pay taxes on land that has no present or prospective value. We Americans have assumed that, as the nation grew, private initiative would find ways to make land profitable. We have not reckoned with the possibility that private enterprise might rob the land of its usefulness and then abandon it, worthless, to the public again. Neither have we reckoned with the possibility that declining requirements for land use might cause extensive abandonment of land.

Some States are meeting the situation forehandedly. Pennsylvania has approximately 1,600,000 acres of State forests made up in large part of tax-sale lands taken over by the State. New York began a policy of putting tax-reverted lands in the Adirondacks into a State forest preserve about fifty years ago, and is now starting to buy and reforest lands which farmers cannot make pay. Michigan makes all tax-reverted lands available for extending her system of State forests,

in the discretion of the State Conservation Department, and has reserved nearly 800,000 acres of these lands for permanent State ownership. Wisconsin encourages the establishment of county forests through the retention of tax forfeited lands, title to which passes to the county. And so on. But while wealthy States like New York and Pennsylvania are financially strong enough to handle their land use problems by themselves, it is a question whether many other States will be able to do so.

Restoring our forest land to productive use challenges the best thought of the Nation. The task is twofold: first to help private forest land owners to hold and employ land for continuous timber production; and second, to put into effect those measures necessary, in the public interest, to meet the conditions where private ownership breaks down. The well-being of the Nation demands that we put idle acres back to work, that we stop the burning of forests and flooding and eroding of lands, and that we preserve the heritage of the people of the United States in forest and land. Temporary financial distress, aggravated in considerable measure by this situation, should not deter us from energetically carrying forward adequate programs for building up our forest and other land resources. A deflated America is merely sick; a deforested America would be a hopeless cripple. In proper land utilization lies the base for our future security. Forestry must inevitably play a large part in attaining that objective. It merits, therefore, the serious attention of our citizens.

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